(b) whether Government are also aware that the pilgrims have to come across with a host of inconveniences during the pilgrimage to Mansarovar; and

(c) whether Government propose to provide specific facilities during the pilgrimage by identifying the inconveniences emerging therein ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH) : (a) 560 *Yatris* are selected every year through a transparent computer generated random selection process following public advertisement.

(b) to (c) It is the constant endeavour of Government to improve and upgrade facilities for the *Yatris*. Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam (KMVN) arranges boarding and lodging for *Yatris* on the Indian side. MEA provides Rs. 3,250/- per *Yatri* to KMVN to partially offset the expenditure incurred by the *Yatris*. Government provides free medical inspection and assistance, and security and escort cover upto Lipulekh Pass; insurance cover and communicaton links for the duration of the *Yatra*. A Liaison Officer is attached to each batch of *Yatris*. The Delhi Government provides free stay to *Yatris* at Ashok Yatri Niwas in New Delhi for 4-5 days during their onward and return journey.

Closure of Indian Embassies

203. DR. ABRAR AHMED : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that the Ministry of Finance has recommended to his Ministry for closure of seven Indian Embassies;

(b) if so, the names of such Embassies; and

(c) the amount etc. likely to be saved from such closure ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH) : (a) Yes, Sir. The Expenditure Reforms Commission (ERC) in its report pertaining to the Ministry of External Affairs has recommended closing down of seven Indian Missions abroad.

(b) The seven Missions recommended by the ERC for closure are in the following countries :

Botswana, Burkina Faso, Jamaica, Malta, Papua New Guinea, Seychelles and Peru.

(c) The Ministry of External Affairs, independent of ERC's recommendations regarding closure of these seven Missions, has decided to close down of the Mission namely High Commission of India, Malta and Embassy of India, Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso). While the Mission in Malta has been closed down, the Mission in Ouagadougou will be closed down shortly. The expected amount of savings accruing to the Government of India per annum on account of closure of these two Missions is approximately Rs. 1.64 crores. A review of the recommendation of the ERC to close down the other five Missions is under consideration of the Ministry keeping in view the larger political implications of closing a Mission abroad.

American Commission on Gujarat Communal Violence

†204. SHRI MOTILAL VORA : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn towards a news-item captioned, "Gujarat Ki Sampradayik Hinsa Par Sunvai Karega Amriki Ayog", published in Rashtriya Sahara dated 7th June, 2002;

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto;

(c) whether Government have registered its protest with the American Government;

†Original notice of the Question was received in Hindi.